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SERMON DCLXXVII.

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THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THE SOUL'S REDEMPTION.

"For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever."—PSALM xlix. 8.

THE carelessness of mankind at large, on the familiar subjects of death and eternity, is equally surprising and alarming;—*surprising*, because the world dwindles to a point in comparison with the immensity of worlds around us; and all its joys and sorrows, when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, are lighter than vanity;—*alarming*, because earth alone is the theatre on which preparation is made for unseen worlds; and neglect of that preparation is followed by consequences, at once fearful and irreparable. The whole structure of the divine administration under which we live is framed with reference to man's salvation; the instructions of the Bible, the teachings of natural religion, the dispensations of Providence, the monitions of conscience, and the ordinances of the Gospel, are all intended to purify and elevate his affections, and fit him for scenes of perfect happiness and transcendent glory. When this gracious intention of heaven is forgotten, and these means of spiritual improvement are perverted, to the hardening of the heart, it is to the last degree alarming.

Nor can the fact of "the carelessness of mankind at large" be questioned. The observation of every day demonstrates it. Who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Who denies sleep to his eyes and slumber to his eyelids, that he may secure the Great Salvation? Are not men everywhere mad upon

their idols? so that when God looketh down from heaven, he is constrained to say, "they are all gone out of the way—there is none that doeth good, no not one!"

Never let it be forgotten that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force;"—that whosoever will enter the strait gate must *strive*, even to agony;—that whosoever will win the crown must bear the cross;—and whoever will gain the victory, must fight the battle with principalities and powers. Eternal life is the prize to be won; hard conflict, involving self-denial and heroic devotion to God, alone secures it.

What more surprising and alarming then, to one who calmly surveys, with an eye of faith, the character and certain destiny of sinful man, than the prevailing indifference on the momentous question—What shall be done for the redemption of the deathless spirit?

*The soul's redemption* is the subject before us. As presented in the text, it naturally divides itself into four parts, viz:

I. The object; II. The nature; III. The quality; and IV. The closing up of this redemption.

I. *The object*, of this redemption. It is the redemption of the *Soul*.

The soul is that spiritual and immortal principle in man, which distinguishes him from the beast. This is the primary import of the term. Sometimes it is used by the inspired writers in a secondary, or figurative sense; as when the Psalmist declares the eye of the Lord to be upon them that fear him,—“to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine;” and when he speaks of the enemy as “persecuting his soul to take it, and treading down his life upon the earth.” Reference is here clearly had to animal life. This figurative use of the term is justified by the fact, that whenever the soul leaves the body, animal life becomes extinct. The co-existence of the immortal principle with the body, is essential to human life.

Still, the soul and animal life, are not to be identified. “Fear not them,” saith Christ, “which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.” The death of the body forbids not at all the continued existence of the immortal principle. Though united, they are distinct; and when separated, each follows the laws impressed on it by the Great Creator, the one bursting forth into a boundless sphere of activity, the other returning to the dust whence it was taken.

It has been thought by some, that the term is used in its secondary or figurative sense, in the text; and it must be confessed, that the connexion in which it stands, favors, though it does not establish, this construction.

To show the vanity of trusting in wealth, and boasting of the multitude of riches, the Psalmist says, “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him;” “that he should still live forever, and not see cor-

ruption." This is a complete argument, proving the insufficiency of any amount of gold to prevent death. Our text is thrown in between the two parts of this argument as parenthetical, and unconnected with it; nay, as a thing entirely distinct from it. Contemplating the certain triumph of death over the body, the mind of David seems to repose for a moment on the fact, that there is a redemption for the *Soul*, which may be secured if laid hold of in season, though the animal life perish, without a possibility of ransom. It is as if he had said: "Man that is born of woman is of few days." Die he must. Dust shall return to dust. No wealth can bribe, no prayers can move, no eloquence can divert the king of terrors. But the Soul, which is in the body, may be rescued from the death which threatens to involve it, and this redemption is precious." It will be noticed that the last clause of the verse sustains, and even requires, this mode of interpretation. For the body, though reduced to its original elements, shall rise again, and be re-moulded and adapted to the tenantry of the immortal spirit. And if by "the redemption of the soul," were meant the resurrection of the body, then it would not be true that "it ceaseth forever"—for the body shall live again and flourish in immortal youth. This, therefore, could not have been the psalmist's meaning. But, when he said, "The redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever," he had his mind fixed on the immaterial and incorruptible *Spirit*—which, however associated with matter, is not dependent on matter, and often displays more vigor of conception, more force of reasoning and more strength of affection, while the body is emaciated by disease and grappling with death, than at any other period of its earthly existence. Its consciousness shall never cease. Its understanding shall forever enlarge. Its power of voluntary action can never be taken away. Its recollections will never die. The energies of reason will never languish. Conscience will be ever enthroned amid its kindred faculties, and the affections will gather strength while eternity endures. Such is the Soul, whose *Redemption* is precious, and at death, ceaseth forever! We are to consider,

II. The *nature* of this redemption.—It delivers man from 'the curse of God's holy law; and, whatever of *guilt, shame, or suffering*, is included in that curse, is removed from him, whenever his redemption is completed.

1. He is redeemed from the *guilt*, or power of sin. By nature, he is a child of disobedience, and a child of wrath. Carnally minded, he is at enmity with God. Though he possess traits of character that endear him to his friends, and command the respect of all who know him, yet there is no love of God dwelling in his heart, and no submission to Divine authority, and no cheerful yielding to the discipline of Providence; but on the contrary, he throws off from him the restraints of divine *Law*, triumphs

over conscience, and stands forth, a rebel confessed, against the Divine administration.

The Glory of God, though it ravishes heaven, is alien from his thoughts. His eye discerns no beauty in the Chief of Ten Thousand. The songs of the upper world have no music for his ear. His hand takes no strong hold on enterprises of God-like benevolence; his heart beats responsive to no calls of duty, which promise Him not personal and immediate advantage; nor does his spirit soar on high, to participate the pleasures of the Holy. Whether he eat or drink, sleep or wake, labor or rest, cultivate his mind or neglect it, his object is self-gratification, not the smile of Jesus, nor the approbation of God.

In a word, sin has entire dominion over him; not perhaps in its most hateful forms, but in the form best suited to his views of personal interest. He cares not what law of God he breaks, if he may but enjoy impunity; nor does he care how much dishonor he throws on God, if self-gratification may be secured. *Self* is the idol of his heart, worshipped not less complacently and perseveringly than impiously.

Redemption breaks down this unhallowed dominion of sin, delivers the soul from bondage and sets it at liberty, enlarges its vision, elevates its aims, diffuses through it the warmth of celestial fire, brings it into communion with the spirits of just men made perfect, and with God himself, and says to it authoritatively, "Go, and sin no more."

2. He is redeemed from the *shame* of sin. Is there not degradation and shame in wearing the yoke of a Master, hurled from heaven, and scathed by the lightnings of God's wrath? in turning away from the Glory ineffable, and plunging into the deeps of the pollution of selfishness?

It cannot be denied. And this degradation of the sinner is *voluntary*. His course of life, his companions, and pleasures, are those of his own choice—forced upon him by no power on earth or in heaven, outside himself.

I do not mean to say, that he is always flagitiously wicked; nor that shame always attaches to him in the eyes of his fellow man. It is not so. Many seeming virtues may adorn his intercourse with the world, and earth's honors may cluster thick about him. But, I do mean to say, that every sinner would riot in indulgence, but for restraints laid upon him by superior Power, and that it is no purity of his heart, that holds him back from the lowest depths of debasement.

"As face answereth to face in water, so does the heart of man to man." Circumstances of education, social disposition, conventional laws, and surrounding religious influences, operate both kindly and powerfully, oftentimes, to control the waywardness of the heart, while the governing principle remains the same as in the votary of vicious indulgence, who glories in his shame.

You have heard the knave boast of his frauds, and the drunkard of his excesses ; the spendthrift of his extravagance, and the miser of his hoardings ; the profane man of his blasphemies, the licentious man of his debaucheries, the angry man of his violences, and the infidel of his contempt for the Bible and its Author. And have you not in all this, an illustration of the shamelessness of sin !

Redemption stops these evil boastings. It turns man's eye to the source of all true glory, and constrains him to love the Lord with all the heart, to serve him with all humility and boldness, and to rejoice in him as the perfection of beauty. It cleanses him from pollution, creates his heart anew, clothes him in the white robe of the Saviour's righteousness, and fires him with heaven's devotion.

3. He is redeemed from the *sufferings* consequent on sin, in the future world.

Even here, his deliverance begins, and advances, amid tears, and prayers, and bitter self-condemnation ; but it is perfected only, when this mortal puts on immortality.

Sin and sorrow are inseparable companions. The tie that binds them together is not always clearly seen, because the eye is blinded. But that tie is strong as Heaven's decree. Grace alone can break it ; nor is it ever broken by Grace itself, further than the power of sin is crushed.

The suffering consequent on sin in this world is light, in comparison with that which follows it, in the world to come. Here every cloud is tinged with light, and every gloom is penetrated by hope ; the bitter and the sweet mingle ; the sad and the cheerful blend their colors on the same cheek. It is not a world of judgment, but of trial ; not of despair, but of mercy. The inflictions of justice, are reserved for the future. Armed with truth and power, what heart can endure, what hand be strong, in the day when they fall !

You remember the consternation of Adam, when he but heard the voice of the Lord God, inquiring, "Where art thou ?" Only conscience had then arraigned him. Sentence had not proceeded against him. But fain would he have hid himself behind the trees of the garden, or have plunged into the recesses of the earth, to escape the eye that had ever before filled him with delight. Keen was the anguish of that hour, when the terrors of the Almighty encircled him, and the miseries of the future crowded on his vision !

You remember too, the fear and trembling that seized the host of Israel, when Jehovah came down upon Sinai, and darkness covered the mount, and mighty thunderings rolled around it, and the voice of the trumpet, exceeding loud, forbade the approach of man or beast, while the eternal law of righteousness was announced. Even the holiest and most favored man of all the tribes was constrained to say—"I exceedingly fear and quake."



Now, if the manifestations of justice, made by way of anticipation, and softened by the interposing bow of mercy are scarcely supportable, what must be the sufferings they will create in the soul, when made in all the awful reality of a sentence from the lips of God, to everlasting punishment! How are they to be sustained, when made not in the gentle inquiry, "Sinner! where art thou?"—nor in the rolling thunder and the lightning's flash, but in the actual overflow of that fiery indignation which shall consume the adversaries! How are they to be sustained, when God shall draw the glittering sword, and his hand shall take hold on vengeance, and he shall throw open all the treasures of his wrath, and exclaim, "Now will I laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind!"

Redemption secures the soul's deliverance from the torments of pride and envy, jealousy and malice, revenge and despair—from the gnawing of the worm that never dies, and the fury of the fire that never shall be quenched.

And more than this; it elevates the soul to a participation in the glory and felicity of heaven! It introduces it to the presence of God, where is fulness of joy, and gives it a throne on the right hand of Jesus, with a kingdom and a priesthood that shall never fail.

Happy the believer thus distinguished! Thrice happy he, who looks forward, with humble confidence and joyful hope, to the hour of perfect assimilation to his Saviour and his God!

### III. The *quality* of this redemption.

It is precious. The nature of it—deliverance from guilt, shame and suffering, demonstrates this. But it still more strikingly appears,

1. In the expense at which it is effected. "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb, without blemish and without spot."

How often, my Hearers, have the unparalleled love and condescension, the voluntary and dreadful sufferings of the dear Redeemer, been brought before you! How often has it been attempted to warm your hearts, and expand your conceptions of Him whom men persecute but whom angels adore! Is it speaking unadvisedly to say, there is not another theme in the compass of human thought, that so imperiously demands, and yet so rarely receives, undivided attention; or another, so well calculated to abase human pride, to inspire hope in the bosom of dejection, and enlighten the darkness that rests on "the bourne whence no traveller returns!" And yet, how little is it loved, how reluctantly contemplated!

But, fruitless as the effort has ever been, to render the doctrine

of "Christ, and him crucified," acceptable to an unbelieving world, it must still be proclaimed in every ear, that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby any can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.

And, it must be told, that when the Son of God laid aside the robes of divinity, and took upon him the form of a servant, and subjected himself to every sinless infirmity of man, that he might sustain the penalties of a broken law, when he agonized in the garden and when he bled on the tree, it was for no fault of his own, nor from the compulsion of superior power; for he was a lamb without spot, a voluntary sufferer, guided by a purpose formed in the ages of eternity, in view of motives more tender and vast than ever came within human comprehension.

And it must be told, till even the deaf shall hear, that his blood alone redeemeth us from our vain conversation; and that he has not only purchased the church with his blood, but washed and sanctified her therein. Had this work involved only an expense of power, like that which first called light out of darkness; or of wisdom, like that displayed in the arrangements of the material universe; we might have viewed it with awe and admiration. But it was more than this; it was the laying down of *life*, the life of the God-man, at the call of justice and mercy united, as the sole condition on which pardon could be tendered and the sinner saved. Here then, Heaven poured forth its richest treasures, its best gifts, its largest bounties. Heaven bled, that man might never die. Such being the price of Redemption, can its *preciousness* be questioned?

2. In the fact that it magnifies the Divine *law*, this appears.

The law of God, an emanation from eternal truth, wisdom, and goodness, a transcript of the Divine character, is the safeguard of all that is glorious in holiness, lovely in benevolence, and sublime in majesty and strength. It is the bond that unites the interests of heaven and earth; the pervading principle of that delightful harmony which forms the basis of the joys of saints and angels. Can it be trampled on, and leave uninjured the intelligences for whom it was made? Can it be violated with impunity, and leave unimpaired the happiness of the universe?

Redemption would be a term of saddest import, if it failed to secure the great ends of the Law, while it brought salvation to the sinner. That would be *no* salvation, which should cost the sacrifice of a single principle in the government of God. Heaven would be annihilated, God dethroned, the whole fabric of the moral universe be dissolved, and no sound but of discord and war, be heard throughout God's works.

By the sacrifice of Christ these evils are avoided. No compromise is made with rebels. No safety is left to them, except in the unreserved acknowledgment of the justice and benevolence of the law that condemns them. With that acknowledgment, attested by faith in the great Atoning Sacrifice, they are saved.

Precious indeed is that Redemption, which defends the government of God from reproach, while it secures peace and consolation to the penitent believer. Precious!—because it encircles the throne of God with transcendent glories, showing its foundations to be immovable, and at the same time pouring a flood of light into the habitations of men, and creating new and boundless joys throughout all ranks of holy intelligences.

3. In the perfect adaptation of the plan to the circumstances of men, this preciousness yet further appears.

Were Redemption to be purchased by us for ourselves, what have we wherewith to pay the price? Is it wealth? But what is the wealth of a thousand worlds paid over into the treasury of the Lord? All worlds are his. Is it righteousness? But our righteousness is a falling leaf which the wind carrieth away. Is it tears of penitence? But tears will sooner whiten the Ethiopian's skin, and change the leopard's spots, than wash away the stains of our guilt. The truth is, we are condemned in the fine of ten thousand talents, and have nothing to pay. Silver and gold are trash; prayers and tears are vanity; love and obedience, even, are nothing worth except as testimonies of faith in Christ. They cannot go back over past transgressions, and make recompense for them. We have no equivalent to offer for our disobedience. And no equivalent is demanded, no compensation is claimed. We are required to "come to the waters," there to wash and be clean, to drink and live forever; and then we are free, "without money and without price." Nor is it the depth of shame into which we have fallen, nor the extent of guilt we have contracted, neither the multitude nor the aggravation of our offences, that will bar us from the presence of God, when willing to come to the fountain opened. Wretched and miserable as we are, poor, blind, and naked as Heaven sees us to be, we may yet come boldly to the throne of grace, and obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. How perfectly adapted, then, to our circumstances of poverty and helplessness!

4. In the unfading glories which it pledges, Redemption is precious.

We need an angel's wing, an angel's eye, and more than an angel's experience, to enter fully into that blessedness which remains to the redeemed of the Lord, hereafter. None but glorified saints, not the noblest spirit of heaven who never fell, can fully understand the raptures of those who sing day and night, without ceasing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,—for he hath washed us in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God forever." Only they can know the pleasures of safety who have escaped impending dangers; and they alone can know the sweets of pardon, who have felt the bitterness of condemnation.

Look, then, steadfastly to heaven, O thou that believest! Look to that world where God, enthroned in glory, dispenses mercy to whom he will; where love and praise mingle in ceaseless song,



without a discordant note; where all is order, harmony, security and joy, without interruption and without end! All this the purchase and pledge of redeeming love! Is not such a redemption precious? Believe,—it is yours!

IV. The *closing up* of this redemption. "It ceaseth forever."

There is a time when the overtures of mercy will cease to be made; when that voice of love which once said, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God!" will be heard no more; when the joyful sound will be unknown beyond the limits of heaven; and earth will be no longer the theatre of rich and distinguishing Grace.

There are those infatuated by sin, and led captive by Satan, who will not listen to the voice of the preacher pleading never so wisely;—who are engrossed with the cares and pleasures of this life, and resolved to have nothing to do with thoughts of eternity, and who, cutting themselves loose from restraints to enjoy what they can, risk the future on the uncovenanted mercy of God.

For them, persevering in their folly, there is no redemption. They lie down in the narrow house, unwashed and unsanctified; they arise, unclothed and unprepared for admission to the society of the Holy.

The day of death closes up their accounts. It terminates their hopes. It banishes each cherished illusion forever. The voice of the Spirit and the Bride no more says to them, "Come." He that sitteth on the throne, no more says, "Look unto me and live!" Neither threatening on the one hand, nor entreaty on the other, meets them now; but awful realities of what they once heard much and believed nothing, surround them; and no sounds are heard but of wailing and woe—nor visions seen but of miseries without end.

O, could they blot from memory the recollections that will haunt them then; could they forget how solemnly they used to be admonished, how affectionately they were entreated; how urgently they were pressed to flee to Christ and accept of eternal life; one chief ingredient in their misery would be annihilated. But forgetfulness itself is no longer theirs! Their abused privileges rise up together to their remembrance; the instructions they received from the Bible, the sanctuary and the godly friend; the exhibitions of deathless love at the sacramental board; and the unnumbered providential mercies they shared; all rush upon their minds with a force resistless, and a terror that no imagination can paint.

Conscience, too, now awakes to its long neglected charge, and while calling up their mis-spent time, their prostituted talents, vain pursuits and debasing indulgences, it points them to the throne of an offended God, bears testimony to his justice and benevo-

lence in their condemnation, imposes eternal silence on the faltering tongue, and clothes all the future in horrors unutterable.

Nor does one ray of hope break in upon the darkness that wraps up the sinner who has rejected the redemption of Christ, either from the world he has left behind him, or from heaven above him. No voice of mercy greets him. No angel of the covenant comes near, with whom he may wrestle for a blessing; and no Lazarus leaves Abraham's bosom to convey a drop of water to cool his tongue tormented in the flame. For him there is no Saviour now, no comforter, no heaven, no glory, no happiness, no hope! Fallen spirits are his only companions, and fawning tempters are become his tormentors. Despair broods over his heart. He sinks. He *dies—forever dies!*

Forever? Oh, yes—forever, and forever! Sinner, reflect while not too late, that when thy season of probation shall be passed, when the offers of redemption cease to vibrate on thine ear, and the gates of thy prison-house are shut upon thee, thou shalt never come out, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

Think not that tears will avail thee, then! No place of repentance will be found. Thy doom is sealed by thine own act; and no prayers nor vows will break the seal, and give thee liberty. Not even the blood of Calvary will avail thee then. To-day, that blood suspends the execution of the curse denounced. To-day, you are invited to the feast of love, and assured that believing, you shall be saved. But that invitation rejected, the Judge will issue the decree of which you have oft been forewarned in vain, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still—and he that is unholy, let him be unholy still!" Persevering sinner! read there your doom. O, consider—repent—believe and LIVE!

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## SERMON DCLXXVIII.

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### FAMILY WORSHIP.

"A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."—Acts x. 2.

A true family is one, though it be many. Father, mother brothers and sisters, have, as it were, one brain and one heart. The same purpose animates them; the thought of one becomes the thought of all; and a like joy or sorrow throbs through all. They partake of the same food, and have a share in every luxury and privation. They have one treasury of wealth, be it much or

little, on which each has some claim. They are interested in the same diversions and pleasures—usually, to a great degree, in the same tastes and studies. They occupy one position in society, and in the state. Is it not right, then, that they who are one in physical, social, intellectual and civil respects, should have a part in the same religious feelings and exercises? Having each a share in the lower interests, ought they not to partake also in the higher? Having the same larder, purse, fireside, and rank, shall they not have the same God and a common altar of worship, around which they may gather? Having the same blood, mind and heart, ought they not to be of one conscience and spirit, participating in a household devotion?

It is so in every family which is a *family*, in the full meaning of that word—which is a harmonious, living unity, pervaded by a like general faith,—not a mere joint-stock company, not a mere lodging-house of kindred, not a loose association of individuals. It is so, and has been so, even among idolators. In the words of Jeremiah, “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger.” Thus the whole household are animated by the same belief and contribute to the same worship, which is a fitting expression of the one common belief. And in a civilized infidel family, all are tinctured with the same creed of denial, and all worship in reality, if not in form, whatever earthly idol, or shadowy abstraction, is set up in the place of God. Much more is this community of feeling and act, in a truly enlightened and religious household, illustrated throughout Bible history and by all our observation. For example, the first act of Noah, after the Deluge, was to build a family altar; in a later age, Joshua declared that “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” David “returned to bless his household;” in Gospel times, children were brought to Christ, as they are now brought in prayer, that he may bless them; and we find Cornelius commended because, as a devout man, he feared the Lord with all his house, and prayed to God always. The fair inference is that he maintained household worship; and it is said that his prayers came up for a memorial before God, that is, obtained favor. And so looking along down the ages to the present time, we find that it has been an immemorial usage in pious families—so much so that it is generally held to be a momentous Christian duty, whether fulfilled or neglected.

These, then, are our first reasons for Family Worship, namely, that a household, being united in all other interests, should be so in religious sentiment and observance; that, as a fact, it *is* so even among the heathen; and that, everywhere, there is usually a household uniformity of non-religious feeling and custom, if not of religious; that where there is a fireside piety, it is fitting and

imperative that it go forth into the act of fireside devotion; and, moreover that it *has* been so in all ages, and *is* so, in every really devoted family—is indeed taught by Scriptural example and doctrine. Here are some five considerations in favor of the blessed usage.

Not to dwell upon these, let us notice next, in this connection, the exceeding and sacred importance of the household, as a fundamental part of the scheme of nature, providence and grace. It is God who, in David's words, "setteth the solitary in families." The household is at first a man's very personality, and it is the first little community, church and state, into which he comes. As, therefore, we have religious observances peculiar to each sphere of life, there should be those peculiar to that sphere which is first of all, and indeed underlies and embraces all others. Since man, as an individual, should withdraw to commune alone with God; and, as a member of Christ's body, should meet his brethren for prayer; and, as a member of the community, should unite in the public worship of the Sabbath; and, as a citizen, should swell the chorus of national thanksgiving and prayer; and, as a part of the rational universe, should join in spirit with the adorations of Heaven itself, of all holy intelligences,—should not man, as a member of the household, have household prayer? The individual soul, the church, the community, the state, and the angelic world, has each its worship, in its several capacity; is the family a sphere too unimportant to have its worship also? It is rather the epitome of all spheres of life, all institutions, all modes of existence. Especially is it, or should it be, the image of the church of God—the first miniature church, and so should have its worship, and keep in view chiefly its sacred character. Happy is that home which is in such a case, whose God is the Lord! God would enlist in his loving service all the strength of solitary thought, and all the strength of church-life, and of congregational sympathy, and of national feeling, and of heavenly communion; so would he gather up the tender ties of relationship between father, mother, sister and brother, and twine them into another golden cord, to bind the soul to his throne—often the strongest cord of all.

Further, the usage accords with the injunctions to various and frequent prayer. Cornelius "prayed to God alway;" we are exhorted to "pray without ceasing," and, again, "to pray always with *all* prayer and supplication, and *in everything* with thanksgiving to make our wants known to God"—in other words, to observe all kinds, and on all suitable occasions. What kind of prayer is more beautifully distinct as a species, than the one in question? What occasions more suitable than the ordinary ones of family life—the assembling to partake of the morning or evening bounty of God's providence, or the occasion of retiring to rest? And then how *much* occasion at these times!—how much

reason to pour forth united thanks for the blessings enjoyed in common by the least prosperous household, to seek pardon together for sins to which *all* may be accessory, and to ask a continuance of home blessings, earthly and heavenly. Then, too, how powerfully does the usage suit itself to the unusual occasions of the house!—sickness, extraordinary troubles, disobediences, unexpected blessings, separations, departures on journeys, and—deaths. They only, who have for years gathered around the home-altar, know that no joy, no consolation, drawn from the world, found even in individual religion and private prayer, can be compared to the flame of gratitude in joy, and of comfort in sorrow, which is kindled on that altar—that altar which is, indeed, made of loving hearts, beating with the same blood and cemented together in prayer. There are some who observe fireside devotion on extraordinary occasions, so evidently good and needful is it then. But, every day, there is new and varied occasion; and any ordinary one may, unknown to us, be destined to be memorable. The family, separating as usual in the morning or at night, may never meet again in life!

Further, home blessings, particularly of a spiritual kind, are no doubt often secured in this way alone—such as otherwise never would have been granted by Heaven. One of the great arguments for public Sabbath worship, in unison with our neighbors and men everywhere, is, that then we are of course drawn to think of our mercies and needs as a community, a nation and a world; for a prayer-meeting, it is, that then we feel the burden of our church gratitude and wants; for closet-devotion, it is, that our attention is there chiefly called to our own personal account with God. And so, for Household Prayer, a great reason is, that our hearts thus best may bear the burden of home interests to the throne of grace; these weigh strongly upon us then; we offer definite and urgent and all-embracing prayer, with necessary reference to these; and, furthermore, we have the promise that where a few are met in Christ's name, and are agreed as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be granted them. The special direction and earnestness thus given to prayer, and the promise laid hold upon, make it doubly sure, that many home blessings are gained which would have been in no other way. A prayerful home knows not how much it gains; a prayerless one knows not how much it loses.

In the next place, where there are children, the parent is pledged to a holy example, by offering prayer daily in their presence. He feels, or should deeply feel, that he has committed himself, by the solemn act, to lead a life before them consistent with his prayers. No doubt every father, or mother, who is in the practice, is conscious of this virtual pledge—this blessed, needful pledge, additional to all others, and stronger than all others in this respect, that it is a daily one and is made before



all the household. All prayer is also a promise to do our part in securing its answer. The man who asks of God success in an enterprise, is thereby committed to do his own part in the enterprise. Family supplication commits to a pursuit of the specific blessings sought, and in general it holds up those especially who lead in it as people of prayer, and therefore of careful life, if they would be consistent. But it is also a pledge on the part of *all*, since all, by the act of kneeling, profess to join in it. For instance, if the prayer be to "grow in grace," each member of the house, uniting in it, is bound to strive after every grace—the graces of faith, patience, forgiveness, love, and the rest. And we all need to join in these daily pledges involved in family prayer; so weak are we—so many the temptations that beset us, especially to an unchristian spirit in the household—that we need to commit and bind and oblige ourselves to be right, and do rightly and only rightly. Shall men give the pledge of a promissory note for a paltry sum of money, or be sworn into a small office, and shall they not give all surety, by social prayer and otherwise, to pay that duty to God, to men, to their own friends, which is more precious than gold, and to fulfil those high offices of home, which are more grand and momentous than those of Judge, President, or King.

But, after all the sureties we give, we are still imperfect, sinful; therefore, further, the occasion is fitly one of confession also, to God, and thus to each other. If we find no grace nor courage to acknowledge to each other our errors, we can at least do it indirectly, by pouring out sorrow to God, in the presence of each other. As it concerns the young, who quickly see the flaws in us, there is emphatic reason for improving such an occasion of humble confession. To guard them against our sins, to teach them to acknowledge theirs, to gain their sympathy, to secure ourselves against harshness—all this alone is enough reason for every parent's kneeling daily with his household, and, if nothing more, at least exclaiming "God be merciful to us sinners!" Though that were all the prayer, it would be much, very much. But it would not be all,—it would loosen the tongue, and make it easy to do what a writer recommends, when he says of parents and guardians that "instead of lecturing their children, always, on their peccadillos and sins, it would be better, sometimes, to give a lecture on their own. There is no other way to correct the mixture of evil you will blend with the family spirit, but to deplore it, and make it an acknowledged truth, that you, too, are only a child in goodness."

Again, in the ways already mentioned, and in others, your children will be taught to pray and praise, and will be variously warned, rebuked and instructed, by this means. "As," to use the beautiful image in the Song of Moses, "as an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her

wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings,"—so will you lift up your immortal eaglets on the wings of your fireside prayer, and accustom them to soar, so that they will learn to mount on like wings heavenward. You teach your children to ask pardon of an offended neighbor, and you lead them by the hand for that purpose; you sedulously instruct them to thank every friend who makes them a gift; many a mother has gone with her children to a governor or sovereign, to plead for some favor. Shall they not be led by the hand, unitedly, to God—trained, at morning and evening, to pray and praise the Eternal King, the Almighty Friend? Nay, shall they be taught to walk the ground, and never to mount above the world—taught to reverence an earthly father, and never, by example, to adore the Heavenly Father? In truth, all your nightly injunctions on them to "say their prayers," will have little weight, compared with your own example at the family altar. Then, too, how much Divine truth may indirectly and sweetly be instilled into them at such times, not coldly taught in lessons! How much kind rebuke may touch them thus, instead of being sharply uttered, as it is likely to be when directly spoken! How much persuasion, warmed by the spirit of prayer, may reach them thus! Fireside prayer is an *education* of the household, an education of mind, conscience and heart. It helps, likewise, to complete and supply what is lacking in example and other instruction—not only to correct what is wrong therein, but to fill up what is sadly wanting. Above all it is a tender education—heart teaching heart; its lessons are written with a pen of fire—are burned forever into the soul.

But this is not all. In my view, one of the chief reasons for the usage is this, namely, it *familiarizes* us, from our earliest years, with invisible things; it makes real the unseen; especially does it bring home to us the being and presence of God, converting it from a shadowy mystery to a bright reality, so that we may have an undoubting, untroubled faith in God, which shall grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength. Look at that home!—see those children kneeling daily before the Invisible One, as if He were verily present in His glory; see them close their eyes, and thus impressed with the truth, that there is a Being and a world which mortal eye beholds not, but the eye of the soul; hear the voice which they daily hear, addressing Him in whom we live and move; and let them see others kneeling with them in reverence to Him. Let all this be a *daily* customary thing, making impression after impression on the young heart, through many long years—that heart which is always, at first, full of trust, belief, vivid imagination and ready feeling. Will not God and Heaven become as real to its apprehension, by this daily exercise, as any visible person, or the visible world? Will not God and heaven be brought home, familiarized, so that doubt and worldliness, even atheism itself, can never wholly pluck out

the soul's conviction? And how is it in families where the voice of prayer is never heard—where the knee never bows—where, in a word, there is no God? Must not He and heaven ever seem strange, unreal? Yes, though He be afterwards found, yet must not faith, in a soul so educated, be weak and perplexed? Family Worship at least saves a family from being absolutely godless, heathenish—or, rather, worse than heathenish, for the pagan has his gods, which he and all his household worship. Every family, where there is no altar, and no prayer at all, is worse than pagan; it is, both in its *tendencies* and in its just *classification*, an atheistical family—a godless, infidel house—almost a home of irrational animals, that know no God, no eternity, but eat, and drink, and sleep, and die. “Like sheep,” says David, “they are laid in the grave—they are like the beasts that perish.” Jeremiah pronounces a curse on “the heathen that know not God, and the families that call not upon his name.” Let no one say that a prayerful spirit, or private prayer, or sacred reading, is enough; for where there is either of these truly, there Household Devotion is prized; and where there is a living piety, there it is usually maintained.

Consider, however, still further, the mighty influence of early associations, as it concerns this practice. Consider it not alone as domesticating in the heart all invisible realities, but as something that throws a lasting charm over religion, and throws a chain of blessed restraint around us, in after years. Have you been trained up so godlessly, or have you been accustomed to hear so unpleasant or heartless prayers at home, or are you, and have you been, yourself so averse to God from infancy, that you never love to recall the heavenly scene where your father, mother, brother and sister, have knelt with you, morning and evening—never melt in heart with sweet sadness at that sacred recollection, softened and beautified as it is by distance of time—never feel that recollection hanging upon you as a priceless amulet, to protect you from the evil of the world, as a potent charm, to save you from indifference, scepticism and sin—never feel it as a thread, small but strong, binding you back to the trust and innocence of childhood, to the hallowed memories of home, holding you back from doubt, denial, if not crime and ruin, yea, drawing you, year after year, with gentle but powerful influence, towards Christ and heaven. It would be enough argument for Home Worship, if but the word “God,” and the word “Christ,” daily heard in tones of reverence and entreaty, were forever after to ring and echo in a man's memory, calling him, in all his wanderings, to return to his Maker and Redeemer.

There is another thought. This worship unites a family in a more sacred and sweet union of love on earth, and tends so to unite them spiritually, that their oneness shall be eternal. It draws them to the same Saviour; it kindles in them a desire and

hope to meet in the same heaven; and it is a foretaste of the holy blissful commingling of the great family above, where are no mortal cares and wants, no old age and bereavement, no strife and alienation, no pain, no tears, no separation.

It will be seen that some of the reasons in this discourse have special regard to the young, but other of the reasons—strong and sufficient in themselves—are for Household Devotion, whether there be young children or not. There is nothing more desirable and beautiful than that a married life be begun in prayer—that hands, joined in the sacred vow of fidelity, be joined also daily before the Throne of Grace. Though there be but two, let them build the Home Altar, and never let its flame expire. And beautiful and blessed is it, where children are grown up and scattered abroad, or laid in the grave, to see the united head of the house, though left alone and silvered with age, still daily feeding that altar-flame, around which their children had been wont to gather—still feeding it to cheerful brightness and warmth, even as the only surviving travelers in a wilderness would maintain a watch-fire, though all their companions had been lost, or had perished, by the way. And blessed and lovely is it where the widowed mother, or the wife in the absence of her husband, still offers the morning and evening sacrifice in the presence of her children, though perhaps not in the presence of strangers; her more plaintive and tender prayers deepening the impressions made by the father's—certainly leaving an impression, a heavenly echo, which never can die—which follows us to the grave, follows us to all eternity.

As to “the stranger that is within thy gate,” it was once required of him to keep the Sabbath of his host, to conform to the religious habits of the house. Assuredly, civility and propriety, if nothing more, would seem to teach that all who sojourn beneath a roof, should conform to the household worship there, if it be not idolatrous, and thus sinful.

I have spoken of the usage as imperative in a pious household, meaning by that where either parent is a believer. Let me repeat the exhortation to strive after a life consistent with the prayers offered, so that these shall not be in vain, nor made worse than vain. The text speaks of Cornelius as “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.” His alms-giving has a double interest in this connection; beneficence is one feature of practical religion; and it shows that his prayers were reduced to practice. The other value of this allusion is that it illustrates the tendency and *fruits* of fireside-devotion. It tends to practical religion; it prepares the family, and every member of it, for usefulness in the world; and this is the crowning argument for Home Worship, that it is the fountain of a Christian spirit which blesses not the home alone, but overflows its narrow boundaries,

and spreads abroad through the community, the church, the nation and the wide earth.

But I do not mean to confine the duty to those who consider themselves regenerate. It is just one of those simple duties which if a man set himself to perform, he *may* find, in the very act of its discharge, a willingness to do *all other* duty—a willingness, a yielding, which may be the turning-point of his soul's history. I have heard of an instance where an irreligious man resolved, perhaps for his family's sake, to do this one duty, and who has since dated his conversion from that hour. But aside from these considerations, I cannot conceive how a man, surrounded with all the delights of home, his heart glowing with the warm happiness which God gives him, can refuse to kneel with his companion, or his family, and at least say with a full heart, though it be in broken words—"Our Father in heaven, we thank thee—we bless thee; forgive us our sins, for Jesus' sake; keep us this day, or this night; bring us all at last to thy presence and joy." How can any man, who is not an atheist, neglect to thank God thus for his mercies, and pray for grace, for continued blessings, for eternal union in heaven? And how, still further, can a father, or mother, in this Christian land, if not absolute atheists, fail to join with their beloved children in acknowledging the God of mercies? How can they permit their house, their children, their home, to be godless? Yes, how do they even *dare* to have it so?

Oh! build the Family Altar, if it never has been built in your home; repair it, maintain it, if it has fallen into decay. Let Joshua's be your steadfast purpose, your lofty joy—"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Weep—melt in heart for all your disastrous and guilty neglect, or poor, hurried, heartless performance, in times past. Hallow the table of God's daily bounty, with a blessing sincerely asked, thanks sincerely given. Bring forth the dusty Bible—confess your neglect to your fireside companions—read and pray with them, at morning, or evening, or both, as did your father, and your father's father before you. Can you not find words nor courage? You find it for conversation—for everything else; nothing but practice makes *anything* easy; nor is it *what* you say, but how you say it—in what spirit you pray—that is the great thing. Or if your words be many, recollect that we are not heard for our much speaking; be not tediously prolix in reading nor in supplication. Yet be not hurried; *take* time, if you have it not; the time spent in God's worship is never *lost*, even in an earthly point of view. Let not the Sabbath be the only day when you observe the duty—say not thus, *in effect*, to your family, that you worship God only when you have nothing else to do. Read, if it seem best, with a commentary beneath the text, at which your eyes may glance for an explanation of a difficult verse, and so elicit attention and interest. Sing, if you can, if it be in your hearts, and



circumstances admit—sing, though it be but one sweet stanza of praise. Teach the young hearts, whom God has given you to train—teach them to join in the prayer. Let it be the simple outpouring of whatever gratitude or wish may spring up in your soul, and not a set form of speech, mechanically repeated. Thus perpetuate, in its life and beauty, this right and happy institution. Hand it down as a rich legacy to those who come after you. So shall your father's God be your God, and your children's—so shall you and they be ripening for the family of the redeemed—the worship above—the Heavenly Home.

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### A CONSECRATED MINISTRY.

BY BISHOP POTTER, NEW YORK.

What have the ministers of Christ to do with pride and self seeking? What have they to do with scheming and contriving for their own advancement? What have they to do with good or evil fortune in the things of this world? What have they to do with aping the silly fashions and vanities of the day? What have they to do with the gross manners, the irritable tempers, the sensual habits, the vulgar, ignoble thoughts, the idle words, the wretched bickering and jealousies, and the unkind judgments and harsh speeches of the men of this world? What have the ministers of Christ to do with studying how they may please themselves, and how they may win those places which will be most in the eye of the world, and most abundant in comfort and luxury? If every follower of Christ is commanded, on pain of rejection or reprobation, "to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and that, too, with the promise that all other things needful shall be added unto him, with what fitness or decency can a minister of Christ hold back from the work given him to do, (which he has been set apart and empowered, and bound by a vow to do,) until he can find where he may do it with the most comfort and on the best terms. What sort of spectacle is presented to the eye of God and holy Angels, to the earnest-minded in the church, when, on the one side, churches are seen closed, stations left vacant, sheep wandering without a shepherd, souls perishing for lack of bread; and, on the other, ten, twenty, thirty ministers of Christ looking for fields of labor, standing all the day idle, asking, not where most and hardest work is to be done, but where a certain style of living can be maintained, and a certain scale of expense be provided for? What idea shall we form of that candidate for the sacred minis-

try—what hope of his future career—when we see him bestowing his thoughts and his affections upon domestic pleasures, pledging himself to the duties and responsibilities, and cares and embarrassments of a family, before he has been fully trained for his holy warfare—before he has earned a single comfort by noble self-sacrifice—before he has gained the least assurance that he can command bread or shelter for a second life? What respect can we entertain for the youthful candidate—what hopes for the church he is to serve—when we see him reversing the rule and order of our Lord, and seeking *first* how he may please her whom he hath chosen beforehand to be his wife, and how he may provide for her and for himself the comforts and elegancies which sensual habits and the opinions of the world have rendered necessary?—and when we see him afterward holding back from the ministry of the Word—holding back, not from *vows*, but from the keeping of them—holding back from instant service, leaving breaches unfilled, because there is, in a worldly view, little honor and little profit in the post which implores his succor? Can we say of such that they are conformed to the pattern of their Master, Christ? Is it true of them that “they are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world?” They may boast of Apostolic succession, but are they of the true Apostolic stamp? Are they moulded after the fashion of those first preachers of righteousness who took their conception and measure of the Christian ministry fresh from the life of its Divine Founder?—those holy men who willingly suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but dross, that they might win Christ—who counted not their lives dear unto them in the fulfilment of their ministry—who combined the hardness and severity of John the Baptist with the glowing love, the meekness and gentleness of the Lord that bought them—are *these* effeminate, grovelling, sensual, self-seeking, and self-indulgent, recreant soldiers of the Cross, fit to be numbered among those noble martyrs and confessors, or to be considered as in any respect of the same spirit? If the Christian ministry is, in itself, the noblest, the sublimest work to which mortal man can be called, where is the *dignity*, where is the *heroism* of it, when prosecuted in the temper I have exposed? A ministry so perverted and abused, is of all things most base and ignoble. O, degenerated age! O, abused and afflicted Church! when those who come to serve at her altars, come in the hope and with the design of uniting the service of God with the service of Mammon!